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New York

President: Mr. Thomson ..... (Fiji)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 119 (*continued*)

Commemoration of the abolition of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade

Commemorative meeting of the General Assembly to mark the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

The President: Today, for the tenth time, we mark the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. It is a day to remember, reflect and recommit to action. I think of a sentiment often ascribed to South African pianist Abdullah Ibrahim:

> "People say that slaves were taken from Africa. This is not true. People were taken from Africa, among them healers and priests, and were made into slaves."

Those words are a stark reminder of the depth of inhumanity and suffering inflicted by the scourge of slavery on the lives of so many. More than 15 million African men, women and children were victims of that cruel and barbaric practice, brutally uprooted from their families and homes and transported in unthinkable conditions to far-off lands to be exploited for economic gain. Many lost their lives on their perilous journeys, as did others in their heroic attempts to resist enslavement. Those who survived were subjected to degrading and dehumanizing treatment at the hands of their captors, usually lasting until the end of their days. It was a practice of unfathomable cruelty and callousness that astonishingly continued for over 400 years.

Today, as we honour the victims, let us therefore take a moment to remember the people — the men, women and children — whose lives, hopes, dreams and potential were extinguished by the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade. Let us use this opportunity to renew our determination to ensure that this dark scar on humankind's history — this crime against humanity — is not repeated ever again.

However, this commitment requires active engagement, investment and resolve from us all. We must commit to promoting and protecting the human rights of all people, including by upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant international instruments. We must commit to stamping out racism, prejudice and xenophobia in all its manifestations, including by educating people about these painful pages in human history; it is part of our efforts to promote intercultural understanding. We must commit to ending all vestiges of modern forms of slavery, including human trafficking, forced labour and child labour. When these acts do occur, we must commit to the pursuit of justice and accountability for those who perpetrate these crimes. We must commit to ensuring that the lessons of history are shared with future generations, including the treatment of the victims and the conditions that allowed it to occur.

Commemorations such as today's and the *Ark of Return* memorial outside United Nations

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Headquarters — and I hope that all our visitors will see it this afternoon before they depart from the United Nations campus — are powerful reminders of the scale of the tragedy, the horrors of enslavement and the need for vigilance against warning signs of racism, bigotry and dehumanization of others. I thank the Member States that contributed to the permanent memorial fund for the *Ark of Return*, the Department of Public Information for its important work under the "Remember Slavery: Celebrating the Heritage and Culture of the African Diaspora and its Roots" programme, and UNESCO for its work through its Slave Route project.

The theme of this year's commemoration, "Remember slavery: recognizing the legacy and contributions of people of African descent", could not be more timely. It is a reminder that the consequences of enslavement do not end at emancipation, but continue to be felt by many to this day. Some of these consequences have been negative, including systematic poverty, inequality and social, economic and political marginalization. But others have been hugely positive, including the contribution that descendants have made to shaping our modern, multicultural societies and to ensuring that the memories of their ancestors continue to live on.

Let us therefore commit to righting past wrongs. Let us ensure that the development gains under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development reach those who continue to bear the intergenerational scars of slavery. Let us ensure that the tragedy of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade are never forgotten.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General: It is an honour to join the General Assembly in commemorating the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. We must never forget this dark chapter of human history, and we must always remember the role played by many of our countries — including my own, Portugal — in carrying out the largest forced migration in history and in robbing so many millions of people of their dignity and often also of their lives.

The legacy of slavery resounds through the ages. The world has yet to overcome racism. Many countries still suffer from economic patterns and decisions set in motion long ago. Many families still keenly feel the trauma imposed on their forebears. We must continue to recognize the persistent pain of this legacy even in the present moment. Moreover, we know that while some forms of slavery may have been abolished, others have emerged to blight our world, including human trafficking and forced and bonded labour. Heeding the lessons of yesterday means fighting these ills today.

The theme for this year's International Day, "Remember slavery: recognizing the legacy and contributions of people of African descent," invites us to pay tribute to the many achievements of the African diaspora. We see these contributions in every field of human endeavour. The descendants of slaves have made their mark as inventors, economists and jurists, as authors and scholars, as artists and athletes, as politicians and civil rights leaders.

Mae Jemison was the first African-American woman to enter outer space. She is among the distinguished individuals of African descent who are being honoured in an exhibition currently on display in our Visitors' Lobby. One descendant of slaves made an imprint on the United Nations itself: Ralph Bunche, the first African-American to win a Nobel Prize and one of the most respected and celebrated international civil servants in the history of the Organization. It seems especially appropriate at this commemorative meeting to recall the life and work of Derek Walcott, the poet and Nobel laureate from Saint Lucia who died one week ago today. In poems and other writings, he confronted the brutality of slavery and the legacy of colonialism. In "The Sea is History", for example, he gave us the searing image of "men with eyes as heavy as anchors/ who sank without tombs".

The United Nations and I personally attach the greatest importance to the challenge of slavery, past and present. Through our Remember Slavery programme, we will continue shedding light on tragedies related to slavery and highlighting the impressive and living contributions that people of African descent are making to their communities and to our world. These are two crucial ways through which we can combat racism.

At this time of rising divisiveness, let us unite against hatred and let us build a world of freedom and dignity for all.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General his moving statement.

Before proceeding further, and as indicated in my letter dated 21 March 2017, I should like to consult members with a view to inviting Mr. Lonnie Bunch,

Director of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, to make a keynote statement on this occasion.

If there is no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, without setting a precedent, to invite Mr. Lonnie Bunch to make a keynote statement at this commemorative meeting?

It was so decided.

The President: I now have the pleasure and the honour of giving the floor to Mr. Bunch.

Mr. Bunch (Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture): I am extremely honoured and humbled to speak before the General Assembly today as we mark the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

I would suggest that one can tell a great deal about a people, about a country, by what it deems important enough to remember, what it builds monuments to celebrate, what graces a country's museums or what holidays it embraces. Yet I would argue that we learn even more about a country by what it chooses to forget, what it cloaks in silence. Nowhere is this silence more deafening than when countries are confronted with the issue of slavery and the slave trade.

I am haunted by the fact that few countries make a major effort to remember publicly the slave past or the horrors of the slave trade. We should all be haunted because not knowing and not remembering the history, the legacy and the contemporary meaning of slavery hurts the living and dishonours the millions who have experienced the slave trade and the millions who have survived the institution of slavery and the thousands who fought for the abolition of this evil.

That is why events like this Day of Remembrance are fitting tributes to our ancestors because they give voice to the anonymous. It makes the unseen visible and ensures that people will remember. But it is essential that we do more than simply acknowledge history. We must embrace the contemporary resonance of slavery. We must find a past that is useful and usable. We must understand how slavery has shaped in profound ways so many nations, and that in essence slavery is as much alive today as it was 200 years ago. After all, it is slavery and the slave trade that made the modern world, and, as a nineteenth-century philosopher once wrote, unless we deal with the rough edges of a country's past, the experiences of earlier generations will weigh like a nightmare on the living.

Remembering slavery calls for a paradigm shift that helps to redefine the public's notions about the lives of the men and women who were enslaved. Candidly, many in America are uncomfortable, and sometimes embarrassed, by their ancestors held in bondage. They will remember that the enslaved were bought, but not that they were brave. They will remember that the enslaved were sold, but not that they were strong. They will remember the pain of the enslaved, but not their hopefulness. I once received a letter from a member of Congress who said to me, "Why can't you just make slavery go away?" This Day of Remembrance ensures that the memory and meaning of slavery will never go away. I hope that days like today ensure that, rather than a sense of embarrassment or discomfort, this Day will help people find understanding and knowledge.

Personally, I am in awe of my enslaved ancestors. I wish we all had their strength, their resilience, their creativity and their belief in a better future, which once seemed unimaginable. I stand in awe of the will that enabled millions to survive the slave trade, and I am deeply saddened every day by the millions who did not. I am moved by the courage of those who struck blows against the institution of slavery, or use their feet as a means of self-liberation. I am humbled by the actions of Toussaint L'Ouverture and Harriet Tubman, but I am even more impressed by the nameless men and women who rose every day and found that the field would not break them of their humanity or of their humour. I am amazed by those who struggle to keep their culture alive and their humanity intact. Rather than shame, I would argue, we should find strength. Rather than despair and embarrassment, we should find hope. Rather than loss, we should also find our humanity. And, more important, rather than forgetting, we should remember.

We can honour all the sons and daughters of Africa who were stolen, lost or forever changed by slavery — if we remove their lives from the margins and help the places that they called home in North America, South America and the Caribbean understand just how much their tint, their tone, their culture and their national identity was shaped by slavery and the slave trade. We honour the enslaved if we draw sustenance and inspiration from their sacrifices. More important, that would allow us to continue the struggle for fairness and social justice globally. After all, what better models for

achievement against the odds than those enslaved men and women?

Ultimately, the International Day of Remembrance is crucial because it is a wonderful, but uncompromising, mirror — a mirror that reminds us of our struggles and our losses, but it is also a mirror that reminds us of our great strength, of our noble ideals, of dreams and hopes that were once realized. The Day of Remembrance is an amazing mirror that illuminates all the dark corners of our history. This Day should remind us that we must give voice and visibility to the millions of Africans who have been lost to history. But it should also remind us of the need to struggle, to fight the good fight for racial and social justice. To me, a Day of Remembrance is a clarion call to remember. There is nothing more powerful than a people and a nation steeped in its history, and there is nothing more noble than honouring our ancestors and their struggles by remembering.

Let me conclude with the words of a formerly enslaved man. Cornelius Holmes was enslaved in the United States, and in 1939 he was asked, "Does slavery still matter?" His words are very powerful. He said,

> "Though the slavery question is settled, its impact is not. The question will be with us always. It is in our politics. It is in our courts. It is on our highways. It is in our manner. It is in our religion. And it is in our thoughts — all the day, every day."

Think about the gift we give to the world and to our ancestors if, through this Day of Remembrance, we can help people remember that they are profoundly shaped in form and touched to this present day by slavery, all day, every day.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cabo Verde, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Fialho Rocha (Cabo Verde): I have the honour to deliver this statement in my capacity as Chair of the Group of African States for the month of March.

Every year, around March 25, we assemble to mark the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, established by resolution 62/122, in 2007, to honour their memory and to raise awareness of the dangers of racism and prejudice today, which are a direct consequence of that legacy. Indeed, it is one of the greatest tragedies in the history of humankind in terms of scale and duration.

I wish to extend our gratitude to the Steering Committee — whose membership is drawn from Member States from the Caribbean Community, the African Union, UNESCO and the Department of Public Information — for the activities and events planned as part of the Remember Slavery programme.

(*spoke in French*)

On 25 March 2015, the United Nations unveiled a permanent memorial located on the United Nations Visitors Plaza in New York. *The Ark of Return*, created by Haitian-American architect Rodney Leon, is a reminder of the legacy of the slave trade, but also of the importance that must be placed on recognizing the contribution of peoples of African descent.

The transatlantic slave trade lasted four centuries — 400 years of crimes against humanity. Human beings were the product traded. During that long and dark period in human history, there was also strong resistance. The first rebellion in the struggle for freedom came from captives and slaves themselves. The slave revolt on the night of 22 to 23 August 1791 in Santo Domingo, which today is Haiti and the Dominican Republic, was the start of an uprising that would play a crucial role in the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. Known as the Haitian Revolution, that revolt became a beacon of light and hope for the entire world. In the United States, the civil rights movement ensured full legal rights and equality for African-Americans at a time of Jim Crow racism.

(*spoke in English*)

The theme for this year is "Remember slavery: recognizing the legacy and contribution of people of African descent". The theme is illustrated in the exhibit in the United Nations Visitors Lobby entitled "A Legacy of Black Achievement".

This is to acknowledge the non-consensual contributions those enslaved peoples made to the world. Let us not forget the advancements in science, literature, music, culture, art, food and machinery. In addition, the world as we know it today would be very different without the contribution of the people of African descent. In addition, the transatlantic slave trade laid the foundation for capitalism, generating immense wealth in Europe and America. The trade contributed to the industrialization of north-western Europe. Slavery and colonialism were purely economic

driven, with profit being what incentivized one side of humankind to dehumanize the other.

Those who do not know the real Africa may assume that its history started with slavery and colonialism. The truth is that slavery and colonialism were an interruption of Africa's long and rich history. Slavery is not just about numbers. Imagine the lives of 18 million people, their hopes and dreams, their homes and community, and their culture and history. It was not just their present moment that was robbed, but also their nostalgia for a past future. It is often said that Africa is the greatest ghostwriter of all time.

As we take this day to remember the human beings who were ripped from their family and community, let us not turn a blind eye to injustices throughout the world today. How many of us learn of history and vow that if were in that moment in time, we would have chosen empathy, justice and morality? We should look deeply at our reflection in the mirror. We should ask ourselves what we are doing to fight injustices today.

Martin Luther King, Jr., said, "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends". Let us not be remembered for our silence but our recognition of the legacy of people of African Descent and to fight against all types of discrimination and racism in all its forms today. Let us honour each other and commemorate this day solemnly: "Lest we forget".

I want to close with a private note about my own country, Cape Verde, and the role it played in the transatlantic slave trade from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. To put it a simpler way, let me quote UNESCO:

> "The town of Ribeira Grande, renamed Cidade Velha in the late 18th century ... was an exceptional centre in the routes for international maritime trade, included in the routes between Africa and the Cape, Brazil and the Caribbean [and the United States]. It provides an early image of transcontinental geopolitical visions. Its insular position, isolated but close to the coasts of Africa, made it an essential platform for the Atlantic trade of enslaved persons of modern times. A place of concentration of enslaved persons and the inhuman practices of the trade of enslaved persons, Ribeira Grande was also exceptional in terms of the intercultural encounters from which stemmed the first developed Creole society ...
>
> "The monuments, the remains still present in Ribeira Grande and its maritime and agro-urban landscapes are testimony to its considerable role in international trade associated with the development of European colonial domination towards Africa and America and the birth of Atlantic triangular trade ...
>
> "The urban, maritime and landscape of Ribeira Grande provides eminent testimony to the origins and the development of over three centuries of Atlantic trade of enslaved persons in modern times and its relationships of domination. It was a major place for its commercial organization and the early experience of using enslaved persons to develop a colonial territory. The mixing of human races and the meeting of African and European cultures gave birth to the first Creole culture ...
>
> "Ribeira Grande is directly associated with the material manifestation of the history of the enslavement and trafficking of African peoples, and with its considerable cultural and economic consequences.
>
> "Ribeira Grande was the cradle of the first fully-fledged mixed-race Creole society. Creole culture then spread across the Atlantic, adapting to the different colonial contexts of the Caribbean and Americas. Its forms affected many fields, including the arts, social customs, beliefs, the pharmacopoeia and cooking techniques. Ribeira Grande is an important initial link in an intangible heritage shared by Africa, the Americas and Europe".

As a consequence of this heritage, both immaterial and material, witness not only to the human tragedy lived there as the foundation of a slave society, but also the cradle of a new man, the Creole, and a new nation, the Cabo Verdean nation, UNESCO classified Cidade Velha as a World Heritage Site in 2009.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Malaysia, who will speak on behalf of the Asia-Pacific States.

Mr. Yaakob (Malaysia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 54 States members of the Asia-Pacific Group of States as Chair for the month of March.

At the outset, we would like to thank you, Sir, for convening today's special meeting to commemorate the International Day for the Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

This year's theme, "Remember slavery: recognizing the legacy and contributions of people of African descent", is indeed appropriate and timely. The theme focuses on specific consequences of the transatlantic slave trade, namely, the ways in which enslaved Africans and their descendants influenced and continue to shape societies around the world.

We wish to express our appreciation to Mr. Lonnie Bunch, founding Director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, for sharing his deep knowledge on this issue.

We acknowledge that this commemorative event is indeed an important one because it offers the opportunity to all of us to honour and remember those who suffered and died at the hands of the brutal slavery system. The International Day for the Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the transatlantic slave trade also aims to raise awareness about the dangers of racism and prejudice that exist today. There is no doubt that today's event underscores the evils of slavery and its impact on humankind. Therefore, there is an urgent need for Member States and stakeholders to continue their efforts to eliminate all forms of slavery and its manifestations in our collective efforts to end the modern slavery that exists in all corners of the globe.

We reiterate our full support for creating a stronger legal framework for improving policies and practices, awareness, promote understanding and change attitudes by mobilizing our collective will to fight against modern slavery at the international, regional and national levels. It is our moral and shared responsibility, as well as our obligation, to ensure that our future generations do not become victims of slavery.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Asia-Pacific Group, we wish to pay our respect to the victims of slavery, and we will endeavour to work closely with Member States and all stakeholders — including the private sector and civil-society organizations — to eliminate the scourge of modern slavery from the face of the Earth.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Moldova, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

Mr. Lupan (Republic of Moldova): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States on the occasion of the commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

As stated in the first preambular paragraph of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

> "the recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world".

Despite our common efforts today, there are unfortunately far too many people who continue to face violations of their fundamental rights. Racism and racial discrimination continue to be obstacles that prevent many from living in dignity and prosperity. Modern-day slavery entraps more than 20 million people, according to International Labour Organization data. This enormous figure requires us to enhance efforts to eliminate all forms of slavery.

The mass movement of refugees and migrants fleeing wars, poverty or ill-treatment should be our priority since this category of people is more likely to fall victim to this outrageous practice. The upcoming consultation on the future global compact on safe, orderly and regular migration, as well as the discussion on the future global compact on refugees, to begin next year, provide us with a unique opportunity to effectively and efficiently address these issues.

Respect for human rights remains essential in our efforts towards a world free of slavery. The tenth anniversary of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade provides us with an opportunity to recommit ourselves to protecting and promoting the fundamental rights of all human beings.

Alongside respect for human rights, the promotion of greater knowledge of, and respect for, diverse heritage, culture and contribution is an important part of our efforts to eliminate slavery in all its forms. In that regard, the Group welcomes the focus of this year's meeting on the legacy and contribution of persons of African descent to the overall development of our societies. Many of us are familiar with their rich culture and beautiful traditions, as well as their impact on the economic, social and political life of sm of the United Nations. The impressive exhibition currently on display in the United Nations Visitors Lobby, which features notable personalities of African descent, among them many Nobel prize laureates in fields such as peace and

economics, casts a new light on, and brings attention to, their important contributions to the sustainable development of our countries. We are pleased to see such a contribution through diversity celebrated at the United Nations.

In the light of what I have mentioned, respect for human rights, the promotion of tolerance, as well as the mutual recognition of our achievements and respect for our cultures, are indispensable if we are to build peaceful and prosperous societies in which no one is left behind.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Guatemala, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. Skinner-Klée (Guatemala): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

At the outset, let me express our deep appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this plenary meeting to commemorate the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. May I also acknowledge the presence of Mr. Lonnie Bunch, founding Director of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, which is timely considering that the theme this year's observance is "Remember slavery: recognizing the legacy and contribution of people of African descent". Indeed, not only are their roots deep in our social fabric; their science, literature and art are a vivid example of a thriving force that permeates not only culture but politics and social affairs everywhere.

The International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade is a most important ephemerides declared by the General Assembly. It is the pinnacle of a series of events and activities that bring focus and attention to the issue of slavery. It not only is a fitting occasion to reflect on the path travelled, to remember the victims and to honour their sacrifice, but it is also an occasion to address the legacies that remain from that hideous and dark period of human history.

Latin American and Caribbean countries have remained active in the efforts to ensure that the pernicious and dire impacts of slavery are rectified, and have also spearheaded many small, and yet impactful, milestones that to date are part of this commemoration, such as the beautiful and evoking *Ark of Return*, a permanent memorial to and remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade erected outside the walls of this Hall. Additionally, the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024) has been proclaimed and an ambitious programme of activities adopted. We encourage both Member States and the Secretariat to redouble efforts in order to ensure a meaningful and effective implementation of the Decade, while keeping alive the spirit of recognition, justice and development.

The commitments set forth must ensure in a meaningful way that the victims of slavery and their ultimate sacrifice are rectified and translated into opportunities that may transform the reality provided to their descendants, who populate and enrich our region, bringing the diversity and strength that makes our societies strong, as well as multicultural, multi-ethnic and plurilingual.

Approximately 200 million people who identify themselves as being of African descent live in the Americas. Many millions more live in other parts of the world, outside of the African continent. Whether as descendants of the victims of the transatlantic slave trade or, more recently, as migrants, they constitute some of the poorest and most marginalized groups of society, facing, to date, limited access to quality education, health services, housing and social welfare. We must remember that migrants have also made, and continue to make, positive and profound contributions to economic and social development in their host societies. They also create wealth. They can help respond to demographic trends, labour shortages and other challenges in host societies, and add fresh skills and dynamism to their economies.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the lingering effects of slavery have had, and continue to have, an indelible impact on our societies. On the one hand, we have a diversity of ethnicity and culture that translates into valuable human capital. On the other hand, however, we have ingrained a social stratification that originated during the colonial era, when the exploitation of both indigenous and enslaved peoples took place. Latin American and Caribbean States are today determined to achieve a free and pluralistic society where all people enjoy equal rights, where one's prospects and developmental achievements are not conditioned by the colour of one's skin or ethnic origin. We strive for a fully inclusive and peaceful society where all citizens

can progress and have the same opportunities and can, of course, contribute freely to that progress.

We must not forget what was pledged in the United Nations Millennium Declaration:

> "Human beings must respect one other, in all their diversity of belief, culture and language. Differences within and between societies should be neither feared nor repressed, but cherished as a precious asset of humanity. A culture of peace and dialogue among all civilizations should be actively promoted." (*resolution 55/2, para. 6*)

Slavery is therefore anathema to the Declaration. In that regard, our aim must be to work to empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, economic background or any other status.

As mentioned, science, art and literature are a perfect conduit for promoting dialogue and ensuring inclusive and peaceful societies. Only when human virtues and capacities are freely unleashed will sustaining peace have a chance to prosper and enable younger generations to profit from it. The thinking of such erudite persons as the Nobel Peace Laureate Derek Walcott from Saint Lucia, who was already quoted in the Hall by the Secretary-General and who, sadly, passed away only last week, reflects the rich cultural background of our peoples, as well as the multiple vicissitudes and injustices that they were confronted with. As he so eloquently expressed in "Sea Canes":

> "Half my friends are dead.
> I will make you new ones, said earth.
> No, give me them back, as they were, instead
> with faults and all, I cried.
> ...
> of owls leaving earth's load.
> O earth, the number of friends you keep
> exceeds those left to be loved."

While slavery has taken many different, although subtle, forms in recent times, it is still a horrible manifestation of human cruelty faced by many around the world. In a recent report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, as the Ambassador of the Republic of Moldova just mentioned, it is estimated that more than 20 million people are enslaved in one way or another. Let us note that bigotry, exploitation, discrimination, exclusion and xenophobia are just the more salient forms that constitute modern shades of slavery and must be expelled from contemporary practices. Let us not forget the voice of the voiceless, the invisible and the marginalized and let us shed light for them with justice so they can come out of the dark.

Today is a day to celebrate, but also a day to take stock and to marshal our determination to confront the current challenges of inequality, poverty, colonialism and other prejudices, all of which are contributing elements that held one race to be superior and another inferior. This ignominious conduct must be eradicated in every manifestation or contemporary form.

We in the Americas are mostly a young and a strong people. We are rising, and we will continue to rise, from this unparalleled tragedy in the history of humankind, and we will also overcome contemporary challenges. The liberation of many African men, women and children who endured the torment, torture and attempted dehumanization of slavery and who fought against considerable odds to gain their freedom — those persons from whom many of us are direct descendants — have also taught us never to give up, to continue to be strong, to continue to be bold and to pursue freedom and justice for all.

On this day, the Group of Latin American and the Caribbean States can assure the international community that, while some may choose to look the other way, to close their eyes and deafen their ears, they can never say that they did not know about the brutality and cruelty of the transatlantic slave trade, because we will never let the world forget. Innumerable human beings were subject to the worst kind of suffering, and nobody knows how much blood was shed or how many horrors were endured by the people who were victims of an ignominious and ruthless colonial and imperial system. But it is us who know how to redress those injustices and, in the process, also liberate our minds from wanton prejudice and ignorance.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany, who will speak on behalf the Group of Western European and other States.

Mr. Schulz (Germany): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Every year, this day provides us with an opportunity to come together and to honour the millions of victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. This is a day when we remember the fates of the men, women and children who suffered from these atrocities and reflect on this dark chapter in human history. This is also a day to discuss how to best commemorate the victims and educate our children and future generations about the grave injustice of slavery. This year's theme — "Remember slavery: recognizing the legacy and contributions of people of African descent" — serves those important ends. By highlighting the contributions made by people of African descent to shape societies around the world, we not only commemorate the victims but also pass on crucial lessons to future generations about the causes and consequences of the slave trade and slavery.

Telling the story of the African diaspora — the rich legacy and manifold contributions of its people — also raises awareness of the harm caused by racism, discrimination and prejudice. The vibrant African culture and traditions spread in the diaspora have enriched the very countries once involved in the slave trade and still do to this day. To expose the moral bankruptcy of racial prejudices and discrimination, we must highlight how the influences and accomplishments of people of African descent have enriched us all.

The permanent memorial to the victims of slavery and transatlantic slave trade — *The Ark of Return* — which was unveiled two years ago, is not only a constant reminder of the past, but also a source of inspiration in the ongoing fight against the different forms of slavery that still exist today despite the absolute prohibition of slavery, one of the most powerful international legal norms. Too many people around the world, in particular women and children, still fall victim to human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Armed conflicts, terrorism and humanitarian crises have exposed individuals to increased risks of being trafficked, in conflict zones and beyond. In the 2030 Agenda, all of our countries have committed to eradicating forced labour and ending modern slavery and human trafficking. And the majority of Member States have signed the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. If we are to draw the right conclusions from the past, we must honour our international human rights obligations and redouble our efforts to eradicate the scourge of modern slavery and human trafficking in all their forms.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United States of America, who will speak on behalf of the host country.

Ms. Amadeo (United States of America): Today we remember the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade. We remember the millions of Africans torn from their families, the countless people who suffered and died from disease, starvation and the most inhumane treatment imaginable as they were put on ships and sold into bondage.

In his autobiographical *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, Douglass recalled the six months of his life when he was "made to drink the bitterest dregs of slavery". Douglass said,

> "I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me."

Douglass' words remind us why the slave trade will remain an indelible stain on our past. It should always disturb us to our cores that humankind was capable of inflicting such brutality on others, that people would for so long deny the universal human attributes that all of us share. That is why this event is so important, why we honour the victims in the General Assembly every year.

The permanent memorial in honour of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, which the United States helped fund, will help present and future generations recall this crucial lesson on the consequences of racism and bigotry. Just as we recall the suffering of the past, we also rightly celebrate the heroism and selflessness of the many people who fought for abolition, freedom and equality. Their altruism and relentless demands for respect of universal human rights changed the course of history. They included people like Douglass, who became one of the most forceful advocates for abolition after escaping from slavery, Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth. Their efforts should inspire us to act in defence of the dignity and worth of all people — a central principle of the Charter of the United Nations.

This event therefore serves another important purpose. We must commit to justice in the present by

doing more to confront modern slavery — the horrific practices of human trafficking, including sex trafficking and forced labour. The United States is determined to do more to help in that fight, including through our programme to end modern slavery, a new $250 million initiative to fund transformational projects designed to reduce the prevalence of modern slavery in targeted populations and leverage additional contributions from partners in the private sector and other Governments. We urge others here to join that effort.

Mr. Rahming (Bahamas), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The United States hopes that, once today's event ends, all of us will leave with a renewed commitment to ensuring that no one, in any corner of the world, should live in fear of the horrors of trafficking and slavery.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): I align myself with the statement delivered by the Ambassador of Cabo Verde in his capacity as Chair of the Group of African States.

The commemoration of the abolition of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade organized by the General Assembly on the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, which marks that tragic history and the theme of which this year is entitled "Remember slavery: recognizing the legacy and contributions of people of African descent", offers us an opportunity to remember a sad and dark chapter from the annals of humankind. That sad history was shared by my country, Equatorial Guinea, and many other countries in the region, hundreds of years ago when those who were sadly labelled Black Pearls or Human Pearls were exported to other countries and the Americas. Following many decades of vile exploitation of human beings at the hands of other human beings, despite the fact that it constituted one of the gravest violations of human rights, slavery became a great multinational undertaking and was even legalized in certain countries.

On this day on which we commemorate and remember that ignominious practice, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea pays tribute and heartfelt homage to those who succumbed under the yoke of slavery and those who fought against it, and my country honours the memory of those who fought against that terrible crime — a colossal form of intolerance and ignoble injustice.

Finally, we welcome and pay tribute to the restoration of the dignity of those who had been stripped of everything. Indeed, the establishment of a permanent memorial here at the United Nations is not only a symbol for educating future generations, but also a reminder to all those who would prefer to forget. The Republic of Equatorial Guinea is very pleased and proud to have contributed to financing the building of the memorial, around which all of humankind, ultimately constituting a family, must manifest its revulsion for such practices and shout out, "May those practices never be repeated in the history of humankind".

Mrs. Rodríguez Camejo (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Guatemala on behalf of the Group of Latin American and the Caribbean States.

Cuba attaches particular importance to the annual commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. In its belief that it is a subject of particular sensitivity, Cuba supported and co-sponsored resolution 61/19, commemorating the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade and designated today's date, which we honour as a day of commemoration.

The approximately 1.3 million Africans who arrived in Cuba's colonial plantations were taken by force from their villages and families and sold as slave labour on the island. They and their descendants have been the leading actors in the various phases of our struggles leading to our final liberation and greatly contributed to the genesis of our nationality and culture. The Cuban people are extremely proud of their African roots. From Africa, we have inherited our combative spirit, sensitivity, joy, strength in the face of adversity and the love for freedom that characterize Cubans. No other people in the world has contributed as much to forging the Cuban nation as the African people. Cuba, in turn, has contributed the sweat and blood of hundreds of thousands of its children to the emancipation and development of Africa, thereby fulfilling a basic duty of solidarity and internationalism with that continent to which all humankind will forever be indebted.

We therefore welcome the fact that the central theme of the commemorative events of 2017 focuses on recognizing the legacy of and contribution made by the African peoples and their descendants to

today's societies. However, it would be an unforgivable historical mistake to ignore the past or simply try to turn the page. Slavery and the transatlantic slave trade are among the most serious crimes against humanity, the consequences of which have not been duly recognized by today's society. We cannot forget the tragedy and terrible fate that befell the millions of men, women and children whom the transatlantic slave trade uprooted from their homes and who were sent to the Americas and suffered inhuman, unjust and despicable treatment. Much of the world's present wealth is the product of the shame and disgrace that were slavery and the slave trade.

The greatest beneficiaries of conquest, colonization, slavery, the transatlantic slave trade and the ruthless exploitation and extermination of hundreds of millions of children of the peoples of the South must assume their responsibility and offer compensation for the horrendous crimes committed. It is saddening and scandalous that, at the very moment at which this meeting is taking place, more than 15 million people, including 860,000 children, are now at serious risk of dying owing to malnutrition and famine in several African countries, even as some members of the international community remains indifferent.

Cuba firmly supports the just request for compensation raised by the member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). We also advocate the special and differential treatment required by developing countries, particularly in Africa, in connection with their international economic relations. Cuba supports and co-sponsors the relevant draft resolution submitted each year by member countries of CARICOM and the Group of African States. We recognize the importance of strengthening the activities of the United Nations and other international organizations, such as UNESCO, on this matter. That is the least that the international community can do to repair the crime against humanity committed via the transatlantic slave trade.

The Acting President: I would like to inform members that the photo opportunity at the permanent memorial *The Ark of Return* will take place immediately following the adjournment of this meeting, and not at 5 p.m. as originally announced.

We have heard the last speaker in this commemorative meeting. The Assembly has thus concluded the commemorative meeting on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to conclude its consideration of agenda item 119?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 4.10 p.m.